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# An Atypical Affair? Alexander the Great, Hephaistion Amyntoros and the Nature of Their Relationship<sup>1</sup>

(Jeanne Reames-Zimmerman, Pennsylvania State University)

Most recent Alexander historians—especially those writing after Stonewall—assume that the friendship of Alexander the Great and Hephaistion Amyntoros was ‘not purely platonic.’<sup>2</sup> Despite this, the names of Alexander and Hephaistion rarely find their way into modern lists of ancient lovers, nor are they much mentioned in studies of Greek homoeroticism<sup>3</sup>—perhaps because they fail to fit the model first detailed by K.J. Dover in 1978. This dichotomy is a curiosity of recent specialization in classics. Alexander historians assume the affair while historians of Greek sexuality ignore it. In any case, the matter of Alexander and Hephaistion has not really been addressed in light of the last fifteen years of scholarship on Greek homoeroticism. Certainly, the answer cannot be assumed. For one thing, the two men were coevals; that by itself would disqualify them according to commonly agreed-upon criteria. So perhaps it is time to bring these two threads of scholarship together.

In the past fifteen years since the advent of Dover’s *Greek Homosexuality* and the first volume of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*,<sup>4</sup> there has been a veritable explosion of studies concerned with Greek and Roman homoerotic behavior.<sup>5</sup> Where once the interested scholar was faced by a dearth of secondary sources and even deliberate concealment of primary sources,<sup>6</sup> one now has an embarrassment of riches.

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the December 1999 annual meeting of the APA. I would like to thank Gene Borza, Beth Carney, and Paul Harvey for their input at different times during the paper’s genesis.

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton 1973: 31. Other Alexander historians who assume a sexual relationship include Africa 1982, E.N. Borza (personal conversation), Bosworth 1988, E. Carney (personal conversation), Green 1991, Heckel 1992, Lane Fox 1974 and 1980, O’Brien 1992, Renault 1975. Those who argue against it or simply ignore it are Burn 1962, Fuller 1960, Milns 1969, Robinson 1947, Saville 1990, Stark 1958, Tarn 1948, Welles 1970, and Wilcken 1967. The dates of publication in the two different categories are, of course, to be noted. Hammond 1980: 246 and 322 n.14 is cagey on the subject, but implies their relationship was platonic, yet in another place, he implies otherwise: Hammond and Walbank 1988: 14. Most Greek historians still make every attempt to deny homoerotic interests on the part of Alexander: see Green 1989, for amusing commentary on the whole situation. ‘Stonewall’ is a reference to the famous riot between police and drag queens at Stonewall Inn, 57 Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, New York City, on June 28, 1969, which began the quest by gays and lesbians for civil rights.

<sup>3</sup> There is no mention of Alexander’s relationships in Cantarella 1992, Dover 1989, Halperin 1990, Halperin et al. 1990, Thornton 1997, and Winkler 1990. Boswell 1980: 42 and 52 n.26 mentions Alexander and Bagoas, not Hephaistion. Even Christine Downing ignores him in her rather dubious *Myths and Mysteries of Same-Sex Love* (New York 1991), as does Ogden 1996 in recent study on military homoeroticism. Otherwise, the only (non-Alexander) sources which regularly assume a relationship with Hephaistion seem to be gay popular literature like the *Alyson Almanac* (Boston 1989) 147-8, and M. Greif’s, *Gay Book of Days* (New York 1982) 86-7; the historical accuracy of both is problematic, to say the least.

<sup>4</sup> Dover 1989, Foucault 1978.

<sup>5</sup> I have chosen to use the term ‘homoerotic behavior’ rather than ‘homosexual’—so Dover 1989: 1; or ‘gay’, so Boswell 1980: 41-8. I do not think ‘homosexual’ can be comfortably employed. ‘Homoerotic’ seems preferable as it escapes the anachronistic categories of homo- and heterosexual, much less ‘gay’, as well as the emotionally loaded term ‘pedophilia’, by focusing on activity rather than on a personality trait. Ogden’s (1996) persistent use of ‘homosexual’, despite acknowledgment of Halperin’s questions about the term (108,

As a result, certain sociological models for ancient Greek homoeroticism have come to be, more or less, agreed upon by scholars of antiquity.<sup>7</sup> They center on the pederastic bond of elder lover and younger beloved (*erastes-eromenos*). A constellation of restrictions additionally defined these, which rendered the relationships publicly acceptable.<sup>8</sup>

What has not been much considered yet are the *exceptions*.<sup>9</sup> Partially this owes to the need to have a model before one can begin examining anomalies to it. And partially it owes to the nature of the evidence itself, which makes the recognition of exceptions difficult. We cannot see into the bedroom. We know only what the ancients tell us about themselves—and they may not tell us honestly. This is all the more true since it is exceptions we seek and these, because they are exceptions, tend to be concealed: 'closeted.' In the words of Peter Brown, 'it is both our privilege and our accursed lot to work the flinty soil of a long-extinct and deeply reticent world.'<sup>10</sup>

Certainly, in order to determine exceptions in the absence of direct admission, we would need a good deal of circumstantial evidence, which we have for few figures in antiquity. But the relationship of Alexander and Hephaistion is one of those that we can plumb for just such details.

### Defining the Model

We should begin our inquiry by defining what I shall here refer to as the 'Dover Model', as its original elucidation owes largely to the frank and painstaking analysis of Sir Kenneth Dover.<sup>11</sup> Stated briefly, it involves an older *erastes* with a younger *eromenos* who was typically below the age of twenty or, at least, beardless yet.<sup>12</sup>

and n.12) is problematic. He never provides an explanation. Perhaps because he himself questions the dominant model of pederasty, he rejects their terminology, or perhaps he assumes that their resistance to the term 'homosexual' is directly related to the popular pederastic model (his comments on page 111 might suggest as much). Yet neither reason recognizes the real difficulty with the term, which has to do with matters of self-ascription. Our modern psychology-based categories which see sexual orientation as a fixed aspect of personality do not match the ancient activity-oriented categories, though these were perhaps no less profound (contra Foucault). I am not certain Ogden has really given the matter much thought and this leads him into problems, as we shall see, in his discussion of Alexander's 'homosexuality' (122). See Halperin 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Boswell 1980: 17-21, describes the scholarly gymnastics designed to conceal what was once deemed unsuitable material: Greek being translated into Latin, and Latin into Italian. And I myself have had conversations with E. N. Borza about a time when students of ancient history had incentive to master their Latin in order to translate the 'dirty' sections of Catullus, Martial, and Suetonius.

<sup>7</sup> For disagreement with these models, see Boswell 1980: 17-36, and Mohr 1992: 231-42. Mohr delivers an acid critique of David Halperin's constructionist theories, while Thorp 1992: 64-5 brings up more reasoned—and more reasonable—objections.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to Dover's work, see Cohen 1991, Golden 1984, Halperin 1990: 88-112, and Winkler 1990: 171-209. Note the emphasis in all these studies on *Athenian* patterns—a problem of the nature of our evidence. Ogden 1996 voices complaints along the same lines, 108-9.

<sup>9</sup> Cantarella 1992 has some discussion of exceptions.

<sup>10</sup> Brown 1988: xvii.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to Dover, what follows owes to the subsequent work of Bremmer 1989: 1-14, Cohen 1991, Golden 1984, Halperin 1990, Halperin et al. 1990, Thornton 1997, and Winkler 1990; see also Cartledge 1981, Dover 1988, and Padgug 1989.

<sup>12</sup> The question of 'beardlessness' is problematic, a point not much addressed. Dover 1989: 85-6 states

The *erastes* could be a youth pursuing a boy, a young man in his twenties pursuing a youth, or even an older, married man who still had an occasional affair—though a *geron* who habitually chased boys was frowned upon. In any case, some difference in age and social status was critical. Usually, difference in social status was a direct result of age difference: that is, a full citizen with a pre-*ephebe*.<sup>13</sup> But it could be a full-citizen or even a citizen's son with a male slave of any age. Equality was not a feature of these relationships. This does not preclude genuine affection. Expectations of equality were not a part of any sexual exchange.

Nevertheless, certain features of pursuit and consummation were designed to preserve the citizen boy's dignity. For one thing, he had the right to say no. If he said yes, there were grades of submission: anal intercourse was something else entirely from intercrural copulation—though the act described may have been influenced by the medium that it was described *on*. Intercrural copulation, popular on pottery, is rarely referred to in literature.<sup>14</sup>

The *erastes* was pursuer, and also the one who experienced desire (*eros*); the *eromenos* might entertain *philia* for his *erastes* but not *eros*.<sup>15</sup> Nor was he supposed to enjoy the sexual encounter. His submission stemmed from a mixture of respect and pity. One is reminded of Victorian brides who were advised to grit their teeth and think of England. With some dry humor, Dover 1989: 96 observes:

The penis of the *erastes* is sometimes erect even before any bodily contact is established, but that of the *eromenos* remains flaccid even in circumstances to which one would expect the penis of any healthy adolescent to respond willy-nilly.

As the fondling of a boy's penis by his *erastes* was part of courting foreplay, it is difficult to imagine that some boys did not react, since the sexual response is at least partially involuntary. Nevertheless, the predominance of flaccid penises depicted on pottery certainly suggests a gulf between their expectations and ours.<sup>16</sup> It is difficult for us to

that the growth of a beard terminated a relationship. Yet there is evidence of 'boys' (*paides*) over eighteen still being referred to as *eromenoi* (Meleag. 117), an age by which they had surely begun to show facial hair. Yet some men are well into their twenties before they are able to grow a *full* beard, so just what is meant by 'beardless' is not clear. Lucian (43.6) would seem to indicate that any facial hair made a boy too old: '...was just getting his beard...coincided with the passing of his beauty.' But this does not explain the older *eromenoi*. See Ogden 1996: 108 and n.15.

<sup>13</sup> For particular elucidation of the need for this difference, see Cohen 1991 and Golden 1984. But Dover 1989: 99ff., does mention the existence of vases depicting boys of the same age-group engaged in homoerotic activity: 'Homosexual anal copulation, by contrast with the intercrural mode, is portrayed by painters only when it involves people of the same age group.' Yet this point is not much enlarged upon, by Dover or others. Ogden (1996) also points out this lack of consideration of non-pederastic models.

<sup>14</sup> Aristophanes refers almost exclusively to anal intercourse. Cartledge 1981: 33 n.36, remarks that the intercrural version does not appear to have been practiced much in Sparta. He then spends some pages considering whether the greater acceptability of anal copulation might be related to a semi-magical belief (whether recognized or not) that taking in the semen of the senior partner would infuse masculine virtue into the boy (23-7). Ogden 1996: 144-7, also considers this angle with his discussion of 'blowing in.'

<sup>15</sup> For discussion of *ante-eros* on the part of the *eromenos*, see Halperin 1986: esp. 70ff. Note, however, that Halperin specifies the *unusualness* of this term.

<sup>16</sup> Dover 1989 has a number of illustrative plates of vase painting depictions.

evaluate whether this non-aroused state in boys was an ideal rarely attained in reality—or if, in fact, our biases are speaking.

While there is literary evidence that anal intercourse was engaged in regularly by same-sex pairs,<sup>17</sup> most visual evidence, as indicated, describes the intercrural mode. This may be part of the overall attempt to protect a boy's self-respect, even while he functions as the 'penetrated' partner. It is the *erastes* who bends at the knee and lowers his gaze, and there are no visual examples of intercrural copulation while a couple reclines though literary evidence would suggest reclining was not uncommon (Pl. *Symp.* 219). A boy was not to seek out the attentions of his *erastes*, to 'play the procurer with his eyes' (Arist. *Cl.* 979-80) and he might even be expected to put up token resistance. But in some visual evidence, the *eromenos* responds with evident affection, or even enthusiastically.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the roles of the *erastes* and *eromenos* were not interchangeable. A youth might be *eromenos* to an older man, and *erastes* to a boy, but he was never *eromenos* and *erastes* to the same person. His role in any given relationship was static: penetrator or the penetrated.<sup>19</sup> Partners did not exchange places as the mood struck. And certainly, the older partner was never to take the subordinate position of being penetrated. There were derogatory terms for such men: *katapugos* or *euryproktos*, etc.<sup>20</sup> Of course, it should be noted that the existence of special terms points to the fact there were men who took this subordinate rôle whether or not socially approved. One does not invent a term (or several terms) for what does not exist.

Which brings us to the question of exceptions. That they existed is evident and not in contention. Certainly the 'faggot'<sup>21</sup> was a stock character in Aristophanic comedy, along with the persistent stereotype of effeminate male. What is less evident is whether every exception to the *erastes-eromenos* model was considered a deviation, or is our model too heavily colored by Athenian perspectives? As Dover himself points out, by far the majority of our evidence is Athenian.<sup>22</sup> Ogden (1996) in particular questions the pederastic model, especially in military contexts. Homoerotic behavior in other *poleis* took other forms.

<sup>17</sup> Dover 1989: 99ff. for citations.

<sup>18</sup> Dover 1989: R520 [Oxford 1967.304] and R196a [Berlin 2279]; and for an enthusiastic response, a plate found in the Getty, reproduced as the frontispiece for Halperin 1990. Yet it is clear from the *erastes'* expression on the Getty plate that the boy's response was a surprise. The picture is humorous precisely for its inversion of expectations.

<sup>19</sup> See Halperin 1989, 1990, Halperin et al. 1990. I have avoided here the common—and imprecise—terms 'active' and 'passive.' Ogden 1996: 110 notes that the pederastic model assume too rigid a division between these categories, pointing out that no one can know what went on in private with the implication that age-peer pairs may have enjoyed more flexibility in rôles. Perhaps. I am unsure sufficient evidence exists to know, and what evidence we do have suggests *otherwise*. I agree that the pederastic model is too categorically rigid—as I argue throughout this chapter—but Ogden's alternative stems from an assimilation of ancient to modern behavior with which I am also fundamentally uncomfortable.

<sup>20</sup> Dover 1989: 17, 140-3; Ogden 1996: 109 and n.23; Winkler 1990: 61-4; also Henderson 1991: 210-15.

<sup>21</sup> I use this term with some hesitation, but find 'pathic' even less appropriate. 'Faggot' conveys the social imprecation of *katapugos* while 'pathic' has overtones of psychological diagnosis.

<sup>22</sup> Dover 1989: 1-17 discusses the problems involved in the evaluation of the evidence.

In Athens, the setting for most homoerotic courting seems to have been the *gymnasion* (Pl. *Laws* 1.63b). In Sparta, it was the army training grounds. This distinction is important as it indicates different expectations and different views about the role of homoerotic attachments. As Cartledge (1981: 17-36) elucidates, such attachments were part of the Spartan *agoge*. An *erastes* chose his *eromenos* based on military and athletic prowess, not on beauty or birth (as at Athens). Certainly, the two are not mutually exclusive, but it is a difference of emphasis. Since it seems that a lover could be punished for any weakness on the part of his beloved (Plut. *Lyk.* 17-18), it would be important for him to choose a brave and physically tough boy, rather than a merely attractive one. Nevertheless, we still see pairs made up of one senior and one junior partner. The terms used, however, differ. The *erastes* was *eispnelos* (inspirer) and the *eromenos* was *aitas* (hearer). Desire is downplayed in favor of education but that did not, it seems, indicate a more platonic nature to Spartan pederasty.<sup>23</sup>

The pairing of *eispnelos* and *aitas* in Sparta did not end with the growth of a boy's beard. Plutarch (*Lyk.* 25.1) mentions that unmarried warriors under the age of thirty did not go to market, but rather their lovers (or their kinsmen) went for them—yet these are full-grown Spartans. It is unclear whether sexual activity still continued between them, but the use of the terms should be noted. It could be a reflection of a lasting attachment reminiscent of the Theban Sacred Band.

This 'Sacred Band'—Thebes' crack hoplite unit—gives a dramatic example of homoerotic loyalty. The entire justification for the Band's existence and arrangement (150 pairs of pledged lovers fighting side-by-side) is that a man would fight more valiantly for the one he loved than even for his own kinsmen (Pl. *Symp.* 178e-179a, Plut. *Pelop.* 18).<sup>24</sup> In the *Moralia* (618d and 761), we learn that not only did the pairs fight beside one another, but the *erastes* was also responsible for training his *eromenos* as well as supplying the young man with his armor.

The *gymnasion* as part of this should not be dismissed, as the Band was known for including wrestling as a part of their training (just as the Spartans were known for emphasizing dance). In fact, the beginnings of the Band may have been among those young men whom Gorgidas and Epaminondas met in the *gymnasion*. Further, the 254 skeletons recovered from under the Lion of Chaironeia and reputed to be the remains of the Sacred Band (annihilated by the cavalry charge of Alexander in 338 BCE), were buried along with a variety of small personal items—including *strigils* (DeVoto 1992: 18). Such a uniform pattern of burial may reflect the Band's association with the *gymnasion*.

The oath of the Band is one of its more elusive features. Plutarch reports a comment by Aristotle that still in his own time there was a custom for lovers to exchange vows at Iolaos' *heroön* beside the *gymnasion* outside the Protiades gates; Iolaos was, of course, one of Herakles' *eromenoi* (Plut. *Pelop.* 18-19). Plutarch's wording suggests the custom predated the Band, may even have been a regular feature of Theban homoerotic affairs. There is simply no way to know. But it does seem that Thebes had a formalization of the *erastes-eromenos* relationship. One would like to know what they pledged. Some promise of loyalty was evidently a part of it. There does not seem to have been the same

<sup>23</sup> See Plato *Laws* 836a-c; also Cicero *de rep.* 4.4. Modern discussion: Ogden 1996: 117-19, 139-47.

<sup>24</sup> See also DeVoto 1992 and Hanson 1989: 124-5.

movement in and out of affairs as at Athens. This would make sense. A phalanx depended on the cohesion of its line that was a matter of regular training. An army unit could not afford a constant flux of *eromenoi* (or *erastai*) in and out of pairs. It also seems that they remained paired long after the *eromenos* had left puberty behind. DeVoto (1992: 7) argues, 'the sexual phase of the relation normally ended with the *eromenos*' first beard', but this seems more a compliance with the Dover Model than anything based on evidence; Ogden (1996: 111-15) convincingly argues the opposite. It seems, rather, that Boeotia (and Elis) had a reputation for liberality on the matter of homoerotic expression (Pl. *Symp.* 182ab; Xen. *Symp.* 8.32-33). We must be careful not to assume something simply because it fits our preconceived ideas, especially when that model owes so much to *Athenian* evidence.

### Macedonian Homoeroticism

Thus we begin to see how homoerotic partnerships outside of Athens centered as much in the army as in the *gymnasion*. In Macedonia, they centered almost exclusively in a court and/or military setting. We are probably safer using a Theban or Spartan model than an Athenian one. A scandalized Theopompus (*FGrH* 115 F225) reports that Macedonians not only engaged in homoerotic affairs, but took a passive role even after their beards were grown—a telling remark, and perhaps not pure slander. One is reminded of Spartan *aitai* and the members of the Band.

One of the earliest records of homoerotic liaisons in Macedonian society relates to the death of Archelaos who was killed by a former *eromenos* in a hunting 'accident' (Diod. 14.37.6, Arist. *Pol.* 1311b.11).<sup>25</sup> The precise nature of and motivations behind Archelaos' death are debated.<sup>26</sup> What is significant for our purposes is the reference to not just one, but two affairs on the part of the king (Arist. *Pol.* 1311b.12).

Apparently, one of the boys<sup>27</sup> was old enough to be married since, according to Aristotle, his motivation for killing the king was Archelaos' refusal to give him a daughter in marriage as promised. The Macedonian age of marriage among the upper classes seems to have been lower than in the rest of Greece. Philip married his first wife while in his early twenties and Alexander was urged to marry before leaving Macedonia when he was also in his early twenties.<sup>28</sup> Thus, it is not unreasonable to suppose the elder boy, Krateras, was over twenty, if under thirty: a notable point, in light of the Dover model. The passage implies that the other *eromenos* involved, Hellanokrates, was younger. It is unclear whether Archelaos was having both affairs simultaneously or consecutively. What Aristotle does say is that Krateras had resented the liaison because it had been forced upon him. (One supposes it would not do to refuse the king.) At least the affair with Hellanokrates seems to have been current. His participation in the plot stemmed from

<sup>25</sup> Hammond 1990: 263, argues that Krateras was a Page. Our ancient sources, however, are in conflict as to when the institution came into being.

<sup>26</sup> For a thorough discussion, see Carney 1983: 262-3.

<sup>27</sup> Named either Krateras, Krateuas, or Krataios.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis 1976: 45-6, for comments on Philip's early marriages and their motivations. On Parmenion and Antipatros advising Alexander to marry, and a shrewd observation as to why he did not, see Green 1991: 152-3; also Baynham 1998.

his belief that Archelaos had used him for sex in order to insult him. Apparently, Archelaos had refused to help restore his land to him, after promising to do so for the sake of *eros*.

In both cases, however, the *erastes* (Archelaos) is both the elder and the social superior. Usually age alone would guarantee this, but not in the case of a prince—as with the Thessalian Hellanokrates. Who but a king could possibly be his social superior? For an apposite example, consider Lysander's affair with Agesilaos, although at the time that began, Agesilaos was not expected to inherit the throne (Plut. *Ages.* 2.1). Nonetheless, the problem of a prince's status should be remembered with reference to Alexander and Hephaistion.

Philip of Macedon was infamous even in antiquity for his amours with both sexes, and it was a common joke that he took a new wife after each new war.<sup>29</sup> Reputedly, he also had affairs with boys ranging from Olympias' own brother to Pausanias, who would prove to be his death.<sup>30</sup> But again, as with Archelaos, Philip is clearly the age superior as well as the social superior in each case.<sup>31</sup> It is not until the reign of Alexander that we find a record of homoerotic attachments which do not involve the king, and may thus tell us more about their social function within general Macedonian society.

Let us begin with the first conspiracy against Alexander, conceived of by Dimnos<sup>32</sup> and reported in the most detail by Curtius.<sup>33</sup> One conspirator grew alarmed and revealed the plan to his *eromenos*, who in turn told his brother, who went immediately to Philotas and later to Ptolemy when Philotas did nothing about it. Although Dimnos' grievance is never stated outright, unlike the conspiracies against Archelaos and Philip, the sources do not suggest that it stemmed from a specifically sexual insult. Nevertheless the two lovers are central to all versions of the tale and they meet the usual criteria for *erastes* and *eromenos*: one elder, one younger.

Another tale in which male lovers figure prominently is the Page's conspiracy;<sup>34</sup> there are several pairs of lovers in fact, but we are concerned only with the principals: Hermolaos and Sostratos. This time we do know the ostensible reason behind the conspiracy: Hermolaos believed that Alexander had acted in a high-handed fashion towards him.<sup>35</sup> Carney (1983) discusses some particularly intriguing aspects of the plot,<sup>36</sup>

<sup>29</sup> On Macedonian polygamy, see Greenwalt 1989.

<sup>30</sup> Diodorus 16.93-94 and 17.2.1. Much has been written regarding Philip's murder and its motivations, but see Carney 1983 for what I consider the best supposition. For the report about Philip and Alexander of Epeiros, Justin (8.6.5) is not entirely to be trusted, but in light of the affair between Archelaos and Hellanokrates reported by Aristotle, we must not reject it out of hand.

<sup>31</sup> According to a late attestation in the *Suda* s.v. Κάρανος, while a hostage in Thebes, Philip may have been the *eromenos* of Pammenes. Griffith discusses the possibility in Hammond and Griffith 1979: 204-5. If this was the case, Philip would have been only the younger brother of the king, but still a prince.

<sup>32</sup> Called Limnos by Plutarch and Dymnus (Dymnos) by Curtius.

<sup>33</sup> The fullest account of the Philotas Conspiracy, for which Dimnos' plot is the precursor, is found in Curtius, beginning 6.7.1 and running through the end of that book. But see also Diodorus 17.79-80 and Plutarch 48-9. Arrian skims it in 3.26.1-27.3 with no specific mention of Dimnos at all.

<sup>34</sup> Curtius 8.6.7-8.8.23, Arrian 4.13-14, and in passing, Plut. *Alex.* 55. For a full discussion, see Carney 1983 and 1981.

<sup>35</sup> For the accusation of *hubris*, see Ogden 1996: n.124. Apparently while out hunting, Hermolaos leaped in front of Alexander to spear the king's boar, whether from excitement or a desire to protect Alexander or



but for our purposes it is enough to note the high profile occupied by homoerotic affairs. They seem to be a regular feature of Macedonian life, at least among the upper classes. Equally notable is the fact that nearly all of these affairs involve a Page as at least one member, if not both.<sup>37</sup>

The Pages' corps was a kind of officers' training-school, and the members seem to have been between the ages of 14 and 18.<sup>38</sup> After 'graduating', the boys left the corps to be placed in regular army units. But it is within the exclusive and agonistic atmosphere of this corps—reminiscent of upper-class boarding schools—that boys away from home would have formed attachments to one another and to the young men who trained them,<sup>39</sup> and it is likely within this setting that Hephaistion first met Alexander. Curtius (8.6.2) stresses the menial nature of their tasks,<sup>40</sup> and their punishment for disobedience could be—maybe often was—severe, in order to foster endurance (Val. Max 3.3). Within this atmosphere designed to teach them to obey orders, they no doubt turned to one another to vent frustration and humiliation at what must have seemed unfair treatment at times—as Hermolaos turned to Sostratos when Alexander had him flogged.<sup>41</sup>

We must pause to consider an interesting gloss in the story of Hermolaos. Arrian tells us that Sostratos Amyntou was: 'a boy of the same age and his *erastes*' (4.13.3).<sup>42</sup> In light of our Dover Model, this is a remarkable statement. Sostratos is called the *erastes* but we are also clearly told the boys were the same age. '*Helikioten*' is not strengthened by an adjective: e.g., the 'exact' same age. It can mean the same stage of life, generally. Perhaps Sostratos was a year or two older than Hermolaos. Nevertheless, they were regarded as coevals.

This passage is critical when considering the relationship of Alexander and Hephaistion. It calls into question—at least for Macedonia—certain aspects of the Dover Model. In the case of Hermolaos and Sostratos, we are presented with two boys for

with intent to insult. In any case, Alexander had him lashed for the impertinence, so the king at least perceived it to have been an insult. We should note that, a few years earlier when Krateros had saved Alexander from a lion, Krateros was not punished. Although Hermolaos did not have Krateros' social status, had he really saved the king's life, it seems unlikely that Alexander would have reacted the way he did. Protecting the king was a Page's responsibility.

<sup>36</sup> According to Carney 1981. Homosexual partnership, as well as the blurring of 'private' and 'political' motivation, is a literary trope in stories of the assassination of a king/tyrant.

<sup>37</sup> Under Philip: Alexander of Epeiros, and the two Pausaniases; under Alexander: the Pages involved in the conspiracies. The only exception is Archelaos. And depending on the date one assigns to the institution of Pages, this too may have involved Pages, or at least 'proto-Pages.' So noted also by Ogden 1996: 122-3.

<sup>38</sup> Hammond and Griffith 1979: 401; also Hammond 1990: 261-90, and Hammond 1989: 56-7.

<sup>39</sup> Although Curtius (5.1.42) tells us that the discipline of these boys belonged to the king alone, this seems more theory than practice. The king was too busy to oversee personally the training and daily discipline of so many boys: Griffith estimates at least 85 under Alexander (Hammond and Griffith, 1979, 401).

<sup>40</sup> *...ad munia haud multum servilibus ministeriis abhorrentia.*

<sup>41</sup> We must remember these were upper-class boys used to unconditional respect and perhaps even some spoiling. Part of their training would involve humbling them by assigning them tasks usually performed by slaves. But since these were for the king, they could be called an honor. Rough punishment for even minor infractions would have been part of this. Both are common features of modern boot-camps.

<sup>42</sup> *...ἡλικιώτην τε ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἐραστὴν ὄντα.* Arrian also calls Epimenes and Charikles lovers (4.13.7), but it is far from clear that Charikles is a Page so we cannot assume they were coevals, *pace* Ogden 1996: 121.

whom the terms are applied but without the accompanying age difference. Yet this affair apparently coexisted right alongside those that did fit a pederastic model. Was it atypical? Apparently not. Neither Arrian nor Curtius indicate that it was regarded as remarkable or that either boy earned reproach for it. In fact, Curtius gives Hermolaos a wonderful rhetorical set-piece and evidently modeled his version of the story on the legend of Harmodios and Aristogeiton<sup>43</sup>—hardly an appropriate model if Hermolaos was thought effeminate or their love-affair considered shameful.<sup>44</sup>

### Alexander and Hephaistion

Having thus reviewed both Greek and Macedonian models, we may turn to the relationship of Alexander and Hephaistion specifically. In modern studies, Alexander has both been portrayed as a homosexual and defended from such allegations.<sup>45</sup> One side accepts a reputed disinterest in women, while the other tries to deny it. Neither gives proper recognition to Alexander's circumstances or to ancient social realities.<sup>46</sup> He had three wives and (perhaps) two mistresses;<sup>47</sup> there is some suggestion that he had other occasional assignations as well.<sup>48</sup> A liking for women need not be false for an equal liking for men to be true. As typical of his era and culture, Alexander seems to have comfortably pursued either sex.

<sup>43</sup> Curtius 8.7.1-15. It is highly unlikely that this speech bears much resemblance to what Hermolaos actually said at his trial—if he said anything.

<sup>44</sup> Hermolaos would be the offending party since he, though the same age as his partner, was taking a penetrated role and assimilating himself to the part of a woman. Yet he is in no way depicted as effeminate. Curtius gives him, not Sostratos, the pluck to speak out at their trial. In fact, he seems a model *eromenos*: brave, tough, and passionately protective of his dignity. It is nearly an Athenian cliché, which should probably make us suspicious. No doubt the real boy was less ideal.

<sup>45</sup> See note 2 above for a comprehensive list of who accepted his affair with Hephaistion, and who did not. Among those who have made arguments for his *homosexuality* are Africa 1982: 410-14, with a misplaced attempt both to psychoanalyze and to postulate an oedipal complex, and O'Brien 1992: 56-9, who suggests homosexuality inversely by calling him a 'reluctant heterosexual.' Ogden says 1996: 122, 'Alexander's homosexual preference was famous in antiquity,' then goes on to list the ancient evidence in favor of Alexander's interest in men while ignoring the ancient evidence that indicates his interest in women. Ogden also accepts Hephaistion as lover without question though, as we shall see, the evidence is far from conclusive. The most famous attempt to deny Alexander's 'homosexuality' was made, of course, by Tarn 1948: II.319-26; his permutations of the evidence are extraordinary. See E. Badian's equally famous response 1958.

<sup>46</sup> For one thing, Alexander was on an extended campaign that kept him constantly on the move. For another, in antiquity, relationships between men and women—particularly within the upper classes—were radically different from those of today. And the familial structure of a polygamous royal court would have been different yet again from that of a private family in the Greek south. That Alexander's primary *affective* relationship might have been with another man is not only unsurprising, but perhaps predictable.

<sup>47</sup> Wives: Roxane (Arr. 4.19ff.), Stateira and Parysatis (Arr. 7.4.4; Curt. 10.3.12). Mistresses: Barsine (Plut. *Alex.* 21.7), and perhaps Pankaste/Kampaspe (Plin. *NH* 35.86; Ael. *VH* 7.34). Plutarch (*Alex.* 47.4) calls the marriage to Roxane both a love affair and fortunate for his plans. That he did not marry Stateira directly after the Battle of Issos can be easily explained by his military situation, and that he did not marry before he left Macedonia perhaps owed to a pragmatic rationale (see Green 1991: 152-3). But the assumption that his first heterosexual encounter was with Barsine reflects Plutarch's morals (*Alex.* 21), not Macedonian ones. We may presume, I think, that he lost his virginity some time before the age of 22, the infamous story of Kallixena aside (Athen. 434-5). In fact, Pankaste was probably his first mistress, not Barsine. Despite the late nature of the sources referring to her, the main reason for doubting her existence seems to be Plutarch's

In regard to Hephaistion in particular, our three Greek biographers (Arrian, Diodorus and Plutarch) never call him *erastes* or *eromenos* in their histories—only *philos* (or *malista timomenos*). Alexander himself uses *philalexandros*. Curtius and Justin use only *amicus*, never *amans*. Boswell argues (1980: 46-7) that *amicus* is employed interchangeably with *amans* and may carry homoerotic overtones.<sup>49</sup> But as with the Greek *philos*, there is no need to assume it. Arrian *does*, however, use the term *eromenos* to refer to Hephaistion once in his *Discourses* (2.12.17-18): ‘...as Alexander ordered the temples of Asklepios to be burned when his *eromenos* died.’ We know Hephaistion is meant (Arr.7.14.5). Arrian says (1.2-3) that he wrote down, word for word, what Epiktetos’ taught and so the choice of *eromenos* may rest with Epiktetos, not Arrian, but since we have Arrian writing, his wording is worth noting.<sup>50</sup> There is also a late reference in Aelian (VH 12.7): ‘Alexander circled the tomb of Achilles and Hephaistion that of Patroklos implying he was the *eromenos* of Alexander, just as Patroklos was of Achilles.’<sup>51</sup> Finally, we have a reference

claim that Alexander had not slept with a woman until Barsine...despite the fact that Plutarch himself records anecdotal evidence in his *Moralia* to suggest otherwise; see note below.

<sup>48</sup> Plutarch says (*Alex.* 21.5) that he called Persian women ‘a torment to the eyes’—hardly the remark of a man indifferent to female beauty, even if Plutarch goes on to add that his ‘self-mastery’ was such that he did not act on his inclinations. Perhaps he did not; he did say that sex and sleep reminded him he was mortal (Plut. *Alex.* 22.3). We must take into consideration, however, Plutarch’s own agendas in writing his biography—as well as the Greek bias evident throughout chapters 21-22. Probably more indicative of Alexander’s attitude is an anecdote preserved (interestingly enough) by Plutarch (*Mor.* 180f = 760c) that, at a supper party, Alexander asked one Antipatrides, a companion, if the man was in love with his mistress, and if not, would the man give her to him. The man replied that he was in love, and the king answered, ‘Confound it!’—but did not attempt to take the woman. Were he as fastidious as Plutarch’s biography portrays, this casual, if frustrated, inquiry would not have been made. I think it safe to say that Alexander had an interest in women, if one bounded by both high self-control needs and a sense of romanticism that led him to uncharacteristic respect for them.

<sup>49</sup> P.B. Harvey, Jr. gave a penetrating critique of Boswell in an unpublished paper presented at the 29<sup>th</sup> Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1994, ‘After Boswell, Before Theodosius: assessing homosexuality in ancient Rome’, 17 pp.

<sup>50</sup> The *Discourses* are often dated before the *Anabasis*, see Stadter 1980: 179-87, and also Bosworth 1980: 6. Although they may differ on the date of the *Anabasis*, both agree that his philosophical writings occurred early in his literary career. Of particular interest is Bosworth’s suggestion that the Alexander history may have been intended as a kind of philosophical biography.

<sup>51</sup> It is interesting that Patroklos, though older, is called the *eromenos* of Achilles, reflecting an ancient assumption that Achilles’ royal status overbore any issue of his age (so Aeschylus’ *Myrmidons*, Pl. *Symp.* 180a). It was more critical for Achilles to maintain the superior social position. This is obviously important to the question of Alexander and Hephaistion. There was, of course, a persistent Achilles/ Patroklos trope used to characterize the friendship of Alexander and Hephaistion, though much ink has been spilled as to whether this comparison originated with them, or the poetasters. Whatever the case, we may note that at least three allusions to Achilles and Patroklos as lovers exist in ancient texts that predated or were contemporaneous with Alexander, and with which he may have been familiar. Two fragments from the *Myrmidons* indicate the erotic aspect that Aeschylus attributed to the friendship (*TGF* F135-36), and there was also the reference to that aspect of the *Myrmidons* in Plato, cited above. Alexander almost surely had seen the play, and as Aristotle’s student, he may also have read Plato’s dialogue. Finally, Aeschines praises the loyalty of Achilles and Patroklos, contrasting it with sexual promiscuity (presumably the promiscuity of Timarchos, 1.141-42). Aeschines’ choice would not have been so pointed unless he could expect a fair percentage of his audience to know and accept Achilles and Patroklos as lovers. His speech was written in 345, when Alexander was twelve: a likely time for the prince’s first meeting with Hephaistion as well as an impressionable age. The speeches of Aeschines, supporter of Philip and enemy of Demosthenes, may have been and probably were known at the Macedonian court. However Homer may have meant his audience to see Achilles and

in Diogenes' *Epistles* (24) to Alexander being ruled by Hephaistion's thighs. Recalling homoerotic iconography, this is almost certainly a reference to Hephaistion as Alexander's *eromenos*. Use of the term *eromenos* in these passages is suggestive, but hardly conclusive. After all, we are still faced with the age problem.

Curtius (3.12.15) says, 'and though [Hephaistion] was coeval with the king in age, he was rather larger in physique.'<sup>52</sup> The Latin *aetas* used here is very similar in meaning with the Greek *helikia* (Arr. 4.13.3). Given the example of Hermolaos and Sostratos then, such an affair is not impossible. Yet as just indicated, at no point in our five biographers is an affair between them ever made explicit with the terms *erastes*, *eromenos* or *amans*, while Arrian does specifically call Sostratos Hermolaos' *erastes*. Thus, all Arrian 4.13.3 can prove is that sharing the same *aetas*, or *helikia*, does not automatically rule out the possibility of an affair between Alexander and Hephaistion—as a strict interpretation of the Dover Model might insist.

If an affair did exist between them, since Epiktetos and Aelian both name Hephaistion as *eromenos* to the king, we might conclude he was slightly younger.<sup>53</sup> But as indicated above (note 51), as with Achilles, that choice of term has more to do with Alexander's royal status than his age, since Patroklos in the same passage was also called *eromenos*, though he was certainly Achilles' senior. In fact, Hephaistion—like Patroklos—may have been the elder. The most probable circumstance for their meeting suggests it.

Curtius' phrase *pariter eductus* (3.12.15), taken together with evidence from Diogenes Laertius (5.27) allows us to assume that the prince and Hephaistion had met at least by the time of their sojourn at Mieza. We know that Aristotle arrived in Macedonia in 343 BCE to tutor the prince when Alexander was twelve or thirteen (Plut. *Alex.* 7.1 ff.); a group of boys went with them, probably selected from the Pages. As stated above, boys generally entered the Pages at about fourteen. If Alexander were thirteen at the time, that would have made Hephaistion his senior by at least a year. A year or two one way or the other is more significant in youth than as adults.

What other clues might suggest that their *philia* included an erotic side? Curtius makes a curious comparison between Hephaistion and a certain Euxenippus:

[Euxenippus] was still very young and beloved (or dear to) the king because he was in the blossom of youth. But though he was Hephaistion's equal in physical beauty, he was not his match in charm, since his was not virile.<sup>54</sup>

Patroklos, by Alexander's time, a large segment of the population assumed an erotic side to that friendship. This erotic side did not preclude Achilles' (or Patroklos') heterosexual pursuits, *pace* Barrett 1981, who fundamentally misunderstands Greek homoeroticism.

<sup>52</sup> ...et sicut aetate par erat regi, ita corporis habitu praestabat.

<sup>53</sup> Remembering that neither *aetas* or *helikia* means the exact same age, but merely *syntrophoi*. Ogden suggests that Justin's use (12.12.11) of *pueritia*—'boyish' charms—may imply that Hephaistion was younger 1996 n. 138, but it seems to be more descriptive of his looks or self-presentation than his age.

<sup>54</sup> ....adhuc admodum iuvenem, aetatis flore conciliatum sibi, qui cum specie corporis aequaret Hephaestionem, ei lepore haud sane virili par non erat (7.9.19). The name of the youth is uncertain: Euxinippos or Exkipinos.

*Conciliatum* need not mean beloved, but it can and given the rest of the passage, I believe this to be the implication. Euxenippos was a pretty boy who had caught Alexander's eye; the courting cliché '*kalos Euxenippos*' echoes faintly behind Curtius' words. As he was still very much a youth, he was likely a Page and it all sounds rather like a classic affair of the Dover Model: a young man under thirty paying court to a beautiful youth, if one a little effeminate. This makes the parallel with Hephaistion suggestive. The king's current boy is set beside his old *eromenos* (or *erastes*) and comes off the worse for the comparison.

And finally there is the famous account of Alexander's visit to Sisygambis the morning after the Battle of Issos.<sup>55</sup> Arrian has doubts about its authenticity but we should mention it for the sake of completeness since it does bear on our question. Reputedly, Alexander went to visit Dareios' women after the battle in order to assure them that they would be well treated. He took Hephaistion with him. The queen-mother mistakenly bowed to Hephaistion because—to use Curtius' words—he was *ita corporis habitu praestabat*: more impressive-looking. Flustered upon realizing her mistake, she began to re-prostrate herself before Alexander. He forestalls her with the gracious words, 'Never mind mother; you were not far wrong. He, too, is Alexander.' Perhaps the king was punning on his name that meant 'a protector of men.'<sup>56</sup> If the passage is literary fiction, this is highly probable. But if the encounter did happen, the joke would be lost on a woman who did not understand Greek; one wonders, too, if he thought so quickly on his feet. It is difficult what, or how much, to make of it.

It is the deep grief that Alexander showed upon Hephaistion's death that leads most modern Alexander historians to consider their friendship more than platonic. Its extreme nature was remarked upon, or censured, in antiquity as well as modern times.<sup>57</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, his grief was *not* as extreme or unusual as popularly believed when understood in the right context,<sup>58</sup> but it is sufficient here to note that Arrian called it 'no small calamity' for Alexander, and thought the king would rather have died first (7.16.8).

We must remember the two of them had been friends at least nineteen years, if we accept Mieza as a *terminus ante quem* for their meeting. During much of this, they would have lived in close quarters on campaign and no doubt seen one another daily when not away on independent missions. Nineteen years is longer than many modern marriages. In terms of affectional attachment, *Hephaistion*—not any of Alexander's three wives—was the king's life partner. Whatever the truth of any sexual involvement, their

<sup>55</sup> Arrian 2.12.6-8; Curt. 3.12.15-26; Diod. 17.37.5, 114.2; v. also the *Suda* s.v. 'Ηφαίστιον.

<sup>56</sup> So the *Suda* s.v. 'Ηφαίστιον.

<sup>57</sup> So Arrian complains about the problem of assessing the truth behind various testimonies due to hostility or disapproval for Alexander and Hephaistion biasing them (7.14.2f.). And Lucian, in a typical stoic passage from his *Dialogues of the Dead* (397), has Philip reproach Alexander for his inordinate love (*hyperagapōn*) for Hephaistion.

<sup>58</sup> 'Some New Thoughts on the Death of Alexander the Great', with E. N. Borza, presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association, Washington, DC, December 29, 1998, and soon to be published in article-form by *The Ancient World* (summer, 2000). Also 'Hephaistion Amyntoros: *Éminence Grise* at the Court of Alexander the Great', Diss. Pennsylvania State University, 1998, 180-235.

emotional attachment has never been seriously questioned.<sup>59</sup> No doubt as teenagers, both had learned from Aristotle some version of what he would later write in his *Nikomachean Ethics*—that perfect love was the highest friendship (1156b), and that friendship was a state of being, not a feeling (1157b). Moreover, Aristotle speaks of the friend as the 'second self' (1170b) and indicates that there is only *one* special friend (1171a).

Thus, given the evidence for same-age homoerotic affairs in Macedonia and the weight of circumstantial testimony—even if it violates Dover's model—I do think it quite possible that Alexander and Hephaistion were physically intimate at some point. I do not necessarily think, however, that they were still physically intimate in their latter years, though they may have been. Mostly, I don't think it greatly significant to the affection they held for one another.

While they may indeed have been lovers, I think it *reductive* to characterize their relationship solely in this way. Nussbaum (1986: 354) contrasts Greek *philia* with modern concepts of friendship and says that *philia* 'includes the very strongest affective relationships that human beings form... English 'love' seems more appropriately wide-ranging.'<sup>60</sup> Greek *philia* could include a sexual component but extended far beyond that.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, and though speaking of Achilles and Patroklos, Van Nortwick (1995: 17-18) offers an observation it would do us well to keep in mind:

We need to be careful not to misunderstand this intimacy.... Friendship in general is a difficult relationship to fix, seen in our modern cultures as existing on the boundaries of other bonds, familial or sexual, which provide the categories through which friendship itself is defined. The poems we will read here offer another model for friendship, one accommodating a greater degree of intimacy than is often accorded to nonsexual friendship these days. The first and second selves are intimate because they compose, together, a single entity...—at this level of intensity, sexual love is sometimes inadequate as a model because it may not be intimate *enough*. [Italics mine]

<sup>59</sup> The ancient evidence is unequivocal. There are several anecdotes expressing Alexander's affection for Hephaistion, from sending him a delicacy of small fish as a special gift (Plut. *Alex.* 28.3 and Athen. 250) to marrying him to the sister of Alexander's own wife so their children would be cousins (Arr. 7.5). Diodorus (17.114.3) reports a letter from Hephaistion to Olympias in which he reputedly said, '...you know Alexander means more to us than anyone.' The letter is quite probably spurious, but I find no reason in the sources to doubt the affection it mimes. The one point on which all the ancient evidence agrees: Hephaistion was loyal to a fault.

<sup>60</sup> Shay 1994: 40 says, 'Modern American English makes soldiers' love for special comrades into a problem, because the word *love* evokes sexual and romantic associations. But *friendship* seems too bland for the passion of care that arises between soldiers in combat.'

<sup>61</sup> Contrary to Konstan 1997: 108, who says, 'Modern critics have intuited an erotic motive that is absent in the sources and effectively excluded by the label *philos*.' To state that *philos* excludes erotic attachment is too strong, though I do believe that Konstan is correct to note that friendship alone would be a strong enough tie. Erotic attachment, if there was one, would have been incidental, but we need not set up an either-or opposition.

Van Nortwick's observation is a shrewd one. Our model of friendship is not consonant with theirs. Within these ancient societies where homoerotic desire was freely, sometimes emphatically, expressed, intense friendship might well develop a sexual expression even while that expression was not the *focus* of the friendship, or even thought of as particularly characteristic of it. 'The ancient Greeks, perhaps because their societies were so highly militarized...simply assumed the centrality of *philia*' (Shay 1994: 41). It would be inappropriate to refer to the friend as lover (except in very specific circumstances), as such would fall far short of encompassing the whole relationship. Alexander's choice of '*philalexandros*' for Hephaistion said more about the nature of his affection than calling him merely *erastes* or *eromenos*.

### Conclusion

Was the relationship of Alexander and Hephaistion an atypical affair? I do not believe that it was. We have shown that Macedonian society allowed same-age partnerships and seems to have accepted them without comment. Among the Pages, it was not only possible, but perhaps even to be expected that young men would form friendships with one another that included a sexual aspect, but was not limited to it.<sup>62</sup>

What, then, might we gather from this detailed look at one example? Simply that models—even good ones based on careful analysis of the evidence—can put blinders on subsequent scholarship if we are not careful. Without the cognitive dissonance created by the sheer bulk of circumstantial testimony in the case of Alexander and Hephaistion, it would be easy to overlook a relationship like theirs. Even with the circumstantial evidence, we still cannot be at all certain they were lovers. Because such relationships are not atypical for their societies, sly insinuations—such as those made about Agathon the Tragedian<sup>63</sup>—are absent.

It does cause one to wonder how many other such relationships may have existed between less famous *philo*i. While the Dover Model describes the most common—and least ambiguous—form for homoerotic expression in ancient Greece, it was not the only one. There were other options, particularly in military contexts. In short, a confusion of terms may make it difficult for us to pinpoint other such typical 'atypical' affairs, and we should take this into account when employing our models. All such models are to some degree artificial constructs; we should expect them, then, to be ultimately inadequate.

<sup>62</sup> Again, returning to the evidence found on pottery, it may be that such attachments were no more remarkable in Athenian life but have been overlooked due to the predominance of pederastic models. Ogden argues that they were indeed present (1996: 125-35).

<sup>63</sup> He appears as an almost stereotypical drag-queen in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*. Even while allowing for the usual comic exaggeration, it would not have been funny without some truth behind it. Compare Aristophanes' Agathon with Curtius' contrast of Euxenippos and Hephaistion mentioned above.

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